



# The Desert Sun



Our 52nd Year

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**Annapurna assault**

Steve Van Meter, team leader of American Annapurna III expedition, is shown rappeling a rock buttress at the 17,500 foot level. The East Annapurna Glacier can be seen in the background. Story on Page C-9.

Ed Connor Photo

## First time in five years

# It's for real! — Snow in valley

By DAVID S. SMITH  
Staff Writer

PALM SPRINGS — The Coachella Valley was cut off from the west today as heavy snows severed Interstate 10 in the Banning-Beaumont area.

The snow didn't stop at the mouth of the San Geronimo Pass — it also fell in the desert for the first time since Jan. 4, 1974, covering plant life and cars and laying a thin blanket over the ground.

Residents in Desert Hot Springs reported that an inch of snow was sticking to the ground.

Local children, some for the first time in their lives, made snow balls and miniature snowmen.

Besides closing Interstate 10, the snow also cut Highway 62 leading to Yucca Valley and Joshua Tree. Chains were required on all other local mountain roads.

Dropping visibility closed the Palm Springs Airport for a time today for all

Snow flurries and rain disrupted two sports events — one scheduled today and one tonight at Rancho Mirage's Mission Hills Country Club and at Palm Desert's College of the Desert, respectively.

Gene McCauliff, tournament director of the Colgate Triple Crown, canceled the pro-am event of the Triple Crown at 8:45 a.m. today "to preserve the course for match play" which starts Thursday morning.

Rain also caused COD's gym to leak and forced Athletic Director John Marman to seek another site for tonight's Desert Conference basketball game with Mt. San Jacinto Eagles. Possibilities are Palm Springs or Indio High Schools.

For information on the game, phone Marman at 346-1755.

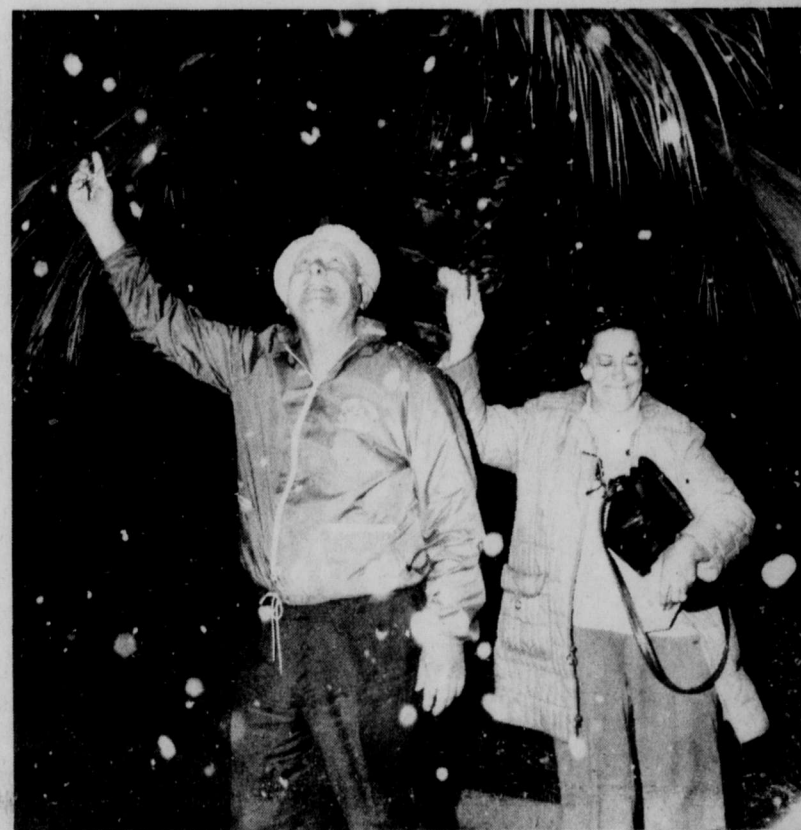
MSJC Athletic Director John Chambers said the snow had caused cancellation of classes at MSJC and that snow in the Banning pass may prevent his team from getting to the desert area.

incoming aircraft. Air traffic was allowed to depart, but only on one runway as the visibility dropped to one mile, according to an air tower official there.

The mixture of snow, sleet and rain made driving difficult and dangerous, particularly on roadways that cross the Whitewater Wash.

Carl Garczynski, of the National Weather Service in Coachella, predicted the wet and snowy weather will continue until late Thursday. Once the storm clears, he said, expect "critically low" temperatures.

He is advising valley farmers to take strong frost protection measures for Friday and Saturday morning.



Chuck Scardina Sun Photo

WHAT'S HAPPENING? — Would you believe snow? Palm Springs residents Fred Windt and Betty Kellogg are testimony to the fact that the white flakes fell over the Coachella Valley this morning.

Highs Thursday should reach the low 50s and lows tonight should dip to between 32 to 40 degrees.

James Workman, spokesman for the Palm Springs School District, said 41 teachers living in the snow-locked areas of Yucca Valley and Banning were unable to attend school today. He said a full day of classes was planned, even though buses have been arriving 30 to 45 minutes late.

And 12 school bus drivers, who have been commuting from Riverside, also were blocked by the snow.

Schools were reportedly closed today in both Yucca Valley and Twentynine Palms.

Linda Vivian, a spokeswoman for the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, reported Tramway Road leading to the lower station was impassable, halting all operation of the tramway system.

Snow appeared to be falling mainly in the upper and central Coachella Valley early today. A spokesman for the county Agriculture Department said crops in the lower end of the valley had not been damaged because the snows had not yet reached that area.

He added that the temperatures were still warm enough, due to the cloud cover, to keep local crops from freezing.

Palm Springs Police reported no traffic accidents and no road closures this morning, but warned the traffic situation could deteriorate rapidly should roadways begin to freeze. They urged motorists to use extra caution while

(Continued on Page A-2)

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## Frosty's last valley visit was in 1974

Where were you on Jan. 4, 1974?

If you were in the Coachella Valley then, you could have been no worse off than today, for it was on that infamous date that snow last actually accumulated on the desert floor.

It was five years and 27 days ago that Frosty the Snowman dashed the desert with white stuff.

Valley chambers of commerce are not too happy today, birds have cold and wet feet and children are happy.

(The temperature at prestime was 79 degrees in Honolulu. And the sun was shining!)

Five years ago there were snowmen reported from Desert Hot Springs to Mecca. And while it would appear this year's snow artisans are a bit rusty what with the weather-imposed layoff, the effort has been made.

All is not fun and games or a postcard paradise, however, as area mountain roads were closed due to hazardous conditions and Interstate 10 was closed.

(No ski planes landed today at the Palm Springs Municipal Airport!)

## Lettuce grower Computerized system still months off to bus pickers

By The Associated Press

"We have a crop in the fields and we are going to get it harvested one way or another."

With that statement, Imperial Valley lettuce grower John Vessey pledged Tuesday to bus up to 500 volunteer workers into his strike-bound fields today in an effort to salvage some of his quickly spoiling crop. At the same time, spokesmen for the United Farm Workers, whose members have been on strike for 1½ weeks, vowed that picketers would again surround the fields.

Meanwhile, growers and UFW officials traded blame for the mini-riot Monday at Vessey's farm. Vessey and Co. Inc. The melee erupted when private security guards and sheriff's deputies tried to forge a path through 800 pickets for trucks and buses carrying nonunion workers away from the fields. About 20 persons were injured in the battle, said Imperial County Sheriff Oren Fox, and almost every window in 40 farm trucks and buses were smashed by rock-throwing strikers.

"What happened yesterday was premeditated violence, destruction of private property, injuries to young women and children," Vessey said at a Los Angeles news conference.

By PETER ALESHIRE  
Staff Writer

PALM DESERT — Stubborn, unresolved questions from the county forced another one-month delay Tuesday in the approval of a \$175,000 computerized environmental assessment system to be prepared for the Coachella Valley Association of Governments.

Questions about what the long-term cost of the sophisticated computer system would be, and whether a consultant's proposal was acceptable, convinced most of the C-VAG executive committee members to postpone a decision for another month.

That puts the complex negotiations on the innovative system two months behind the original schedule.

However, if approved in February, it would take about seven months to actually do the far-reaching study.

The study could result in the first regional view of the limits and consequences of growth in the Coachella Valley. Elected officials are hoping it also can provide a streamlined environmental review process for private developments.

County Supervisors Al McCandless and Clayton Record Jr. asked the most

persistent questions, as they have throughout the long negotiations.

Both supervisors complained of last-minute changes in a proposed contract with Comarc Design Systems.

"I'm surprised and perplexed that so much has gone forward without someone saying 'hey, this is what we're doing,'" said Record. "At first I feel apologetic but then I say wait a minute."

"The county is not going to accept this," added McCandless. "when I deal in contracts I deal in contracts; not some fictitious concepts."

In the wide-ranging discussion that followed, questions were focused on several main issues.

One main question concerned what kind of system the valley will be left with, and what it will cost to operate, once the assessment is completed. Comarc already has prepared systems in Santa Rosa and Petaluma which feature an easily accessible bank of environmental information for any given piece of land. The effect of a given development on air quality, sewage plant capacity, traffic patterns, fire services and other public services and environmental factors can be immedi-

ately assessed.

In Santa Rosa, according to Steve Birbeck, director of Administrative Services for Rancho Mirage, the city pays \$6,200 a month to keep the system updated.

However, it takes a special kind of computer to handle that information. The county Elections Department is the only area agency with such a computer, according to Gary Weidle, C-VAG executive director. The Comarc system would either have to use the Comarc computer in San Francisco, or be put on the county elections computer.

The question, therefore, is whether the county Elections Department has extra computer time. The elected officials, representing the county and six valley cities, were reluctant to use the Comarc computer.

"I don't like us paying someone for a system they're going to rent back to us," said Record.

Much of the ultimately inconclusive discussion focused on whether Comarc could develop a program that could be used on computers now owned by Palm Springs, Indio and the county.

Dick Smith, a planning consultant, said such a program could be devel-

oped, but it would not be as good as the patented Comarc system.

The discussion also passed over some other politically sensitive issues, including how the \$175,000 study will be financed.



Serving the Entire Coachella Valley

### INSIDE THE SUN

Sports

● Palm Springs couldn't break a foul habit while Palo Verde was unable to shake Indio's winning ways in high school basketball. The weather is the big question mark in the LPGA Triple Crown match play women's golf championship at Mission Hills Country Club. Homer Smith, fired as Army's football coach, makes a switch to Harvard, as a theology student. Pages B1-3.

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